
THE FRIENDS OF THE



A Study

By

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"He that bath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and beareth him, rejoice greatly because of the bridegroom's voice:..."

John 3:29

"...Can the sons of the bride-chamber mourn, so long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Matthew 9:15

"...the attendants of the bridegroom do not fast,..."

Mark 2:19

"Can ye make the sons of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?"

Luke 5:34

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THE FRIENDS OF THE BRIDEGROOM

"He that bath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and beareth him, rejoice greatly because of the bridegroom's voice:..." John 3:29

INTRODUCTION

Many things are stated and implied in the above verse. For example, this appears to be some sort of wedding festivity or ceremony as a bride is mentioned along with a bridegroom. However, also present is a friend of the bridegroom. In addition, it is the friend who rejoices at the bridegroom's voice and not the bride. While we often hear reference to the coming wedding of Christ to His bride, it seems to be overlooked that there will also be some friends of the bridegroom at that wedding.

The purpose of this paper is to examine and define the bridegroom, the bride, the church, the body of Christ, and the friends of Christ in order to determine not only who is the bride of Christ but also who are those that become the friends of the Bridegroom.

THE BRIDEGROOM

It is well established in Scripture that the bridegroom is Christ or, conversely, that Christ is the bridegroom. Matt 9:15, 25:1; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34; John 3:29; Rev 18:23.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Many biblical scholars will state, "The church is the bride of Christ." However, nowhere in Scripture does it state that the

church is the bride of Christ. The quest to determine who is the bride of Christ must start with the writings of the prophets. Jeremiah, in recording Israel's apostasy, states:

"O generation, see ye the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? or a land of thick darkness? wherefore say my people (Israel), we are broken loose; we will come no more unto thee?"

"Can a maid (virgin) forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet my people (Israel) have forgotten me days without number." Jer 2:31-32 (See Isa 54:5, 49:18; Jer 3:20)

The analogy is that a virgin cannot forget her ornaments nor a bride her attire, yet Israel (the bride), whom God married at Mt. Sinai, has forgotten Him. The Old Testament book of Exodus clearly shows that God married Israel at Mt. Sinai, but because:

"....backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I bad put her (Israel) away and given her a bill of divorcement,..." Jer 3:8 (See Isa 50:1)

If God had not married Israel at Mt. Sinai there would have been no reason for Him to give the house of Israel a bill of divorcement. Even though God gave Israel a bill of divorce-ment, and Judah feared not and also played the harlot, He pleaded with all of His children to return and follow Him, as in the same chapter of Jeremiah it is recorded:

"Return, O backsliding children (Houses of Israel and Judah, and Jerusalem, see Zec 1:19) saith the LORD; for I am a husband unto you: and I will take you one of a city (Jerusalem), and two of a family (Houses of Israel and Judah), and I will bring you to Zion:" Jer 3:14

This is the eighth prophecy in Jeremiah and this one is unfulfilled as neither the divorced house of Israel or the city of Jerusalem have returned to the Lord. God says that He is "a husband unto you," or some Bibles state, "I am married unto

you," and this marriage can only be to the nation of Israel. God confirms in this verse that He considered Himself married to His covenant people, Israel, and will someday bring them back unto Him. Nowhere is this stated more profoundly than here and at Jeremiah 30:1 thru Jeremiah 31:40. (See also Ezekiel 37; Hos 1:2; Zech 12:10, 13:1; Acts 15:13-18; and Romans 11:25-29.)

The entire story of the marriage of God to Israel is summed up by the prophet Ezekiel:

"I caused thee (Oh Israel) to multiply as the bud in the field, and thou didst increase and wax great (in Egypt), and thou attainest to excellent ornament; thy breasts were fashioned, and thine hair was grown; yet thou was naked and bare.

"Now when I passed by, and looked upon thee, (Oh Israel), behold thy time was the time of love (thou wast marriageable); and I spread my skirt over thee (I espoused thee) and covered thy nakedness (married thee -- cloud at Mt. Sinai); yea I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee (marriage contract), saith the LORD God, and thou becamest mine.

"I decked thee (Oh Israel) also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck.

"Thus was thou (Israel) decked with gold and silver (many wedding gifts adorn the bride);..and thou wast exceedingly beautiful, and thou didst prosper into royal estate (kingdom). " (Israel became rich and prosperous.)

"And thy (Israel's) renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty; for it was perfect, through my majesty which I had put upon thee...

"But thou (Oh Israel) didst trust in thy beauty, and playest the harlot (Jer 3:8) because of thy renown, and pourest out whoredoms on every one that passed by;...

"And thou (Oh Israel) didst take of thy garments and madest for thee high places decked with divers colours, and playest the harlot upon them:..."

"For thus saith the LORD God: I will even deal with thee (Oh Israel) as thou hast done, which thou hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant.

"Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee (Oh Israel) in the days of thy youth (at Mt.Sinai), and I will (re)establish unto thee an everlasting covenant (Jer 31:31; Heb 8:8-10).

"And I will (re)establish my covenant with thee (Oh Israel); and thou shalt know that I am the LORD."
Ez 16:7-8,11,13-16,59-60,62

In verse eight the phrase "I spread my skirt over thee" was a common phrase to denote that a person was taking another under their protection and it was especially used as a common symbol for marriage. The same is true of the phrase "entered a covenant with thee" and this was the only way God could marry Israel -- by Covenant.

"The Companion Bible," authored by E. W. Bullinger, is considered the most complete and extensive one-volume study Bible available. It has 198 Appendices which alone are worth the price of this Bible if you can find one. This noted biblical scholar, in referring to the parable of the ten virgins, stated:

"It is impossible to take the church as represented by both the Ten Virgins and the Bride! If the Church is the Bride, then it (the church) cannot be the Virgins. If the Church is represented by the Ten Virgins, then it cannot be the Bride. The only escape from the dilemma is not to read into the Gospel of Matthew that which was the subject of a subsequent revelation...but to interpret Matthew by what was already the subject of previous revelation in the Old Testament about the bride. See under number one, 'First occurrences' (p.61)." Numbers in Scripture, E.W. Bul-

*linger, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 49501,
1983, footnote at p. 246.*

At page 61, under "Bride," Bullinger states:

"The first occurrence of the word "bride," (Kalah), as applied to the Bride of Jehovah, is in Isa. xl ix. 18. This fixes the meaning of the term (bride) as applying only to Israel, and not to the church, which is 'the body of Christ,' part of 'Christ mystical'; in other words, part of the bridegroom. We are thus pointed to the fact that Israel is the bride (of Christ). Compare Isa. lxi. 10; lxii. 5." Bullinger, supra, p. 61.

Bullinger identifies the bride of Christ as being Israel -- not the church. Interestingly enough, he refers to the church as "Christ mystical" and makes the church a part of the bridegroom. This will be covered in detail later. The necessity to determine who the bride of Christ is comes from the book of Revelation, where it states:

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (Christ the bridegroom).

"...And he (the bridegroom) shall dwell with them, and they (His bride) shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them (his peoples), and be their (his peoples') God." Rev 21:1-2

Neither the holy city nor the bride is specifically described or defined in this passage. However, only Israel was called "The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel....the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee...arise shine for thy light is come." Israel, then, is The Zion, the city of the LORD. These verses are from Isaiah and are quoted in full as follows:

"And the sons of them that afflicted thee (Ob Israel) shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee (Ob Israel) shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee (Ob Israel) the city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy

One of Israel." Isa 60:14 (Compare this verse with Rev 22:2 & 10)

"Arise, shine (Oh Israel); for thy light (glory) is come, and the glory (light) of the LORD is risen upon thee." Isa 60:1 (Compare with Rev 21:11 & 23)

Isaiah told of the wonderful future ransoming (buying back) of Israel and that they would come and sing unto Zion, the Holy city:

"And the ransomed of the LORD (Israel) shall return and come with singing unto Zion (Israel the Holy City -- Isa 60:14); and everlasting joy shall be upon their (Israel's) heads: they (Israel) shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Isa 51:11 (See also Isa 25:8, 35:10, 54:1, 61:19, 65:19; Jeremiah 3:1-14; Hosea 2:14-23.)

The entire book of Hosea is a record of the history of the nation of Israel and her future. Hosea was a prophet from the House of Judah who was told to take a wife from the children of whoredom (the House of Israel). In stating a prophecy concerning the future of Israel, Hosea records:

"Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi (my people--Israel);

"Therefore I will allure her (Israel), and bring her into the wilderness (not Palestine), and speak comfortably with her.

"...and she (Israel) shall make answer there, as in the days of her youth (at Mt. Sinai) when she came up out of the land of Egypt,

"And it shall be in that day, saith the LORD, that thou (Israel) shall call me Ishi (my husband);" Hosea 2:1,14-16

At some future time Israel shall again "make answer" as she did at Mount Sinai where she stated:

"...All that the LORD God has spoken we will do."
Exodus 19:8

And Israel will be remarried to God, and "in that day" the House of Israel "shall call me Ishi" -- MY HUSBAND. In order for Israel to again marry God, there would be a need for another wedding ceremony, as at Mt. Sinai, wherein Christ will be the bridegroom and Israel will again be the bride.

In Revelation 21, the bride is again mentioned when one of the seven angels told John to:

"....Come hither I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb (Christ the bridegroom)." Rev 21:9

Immediately following this statement is a further description of the Holy City, the bride of Christ, symbolized by "a foundation," "gates," and a "pearl."

The Foundation

The book of Revelation, speaking of the foundation, states:

"The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald;

"The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst." Rev 21:19-20

In these verses we are dealing with the foundations of the city rather than the gates of the city. These stones are first discussed by God in his instructions to Moses when He said:

"And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate,...

"Foursquare it shall be....

"....four rows of stones, a row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row;

"And the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond;

"And the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst;

"And the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and jasper:

"And the stones shall be according to the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names;...

"And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgement upon his heart, when he goeth unto the holy place for a memorial before the LORD continually.

"And Aaron shall bear the judgement of the children of Israel unto his heart before the LORD continually." Exodus 28:4,16-20,29-30

This description is almost identical to the divine encampment described in the book of Numbers, chapter 2. The shape there is also "foursquare." (See appendix A)

Clarke's Commentaries, Vol I, p. 446, describe the "breastplate of judgement" in Exodus 28 as having four rows of stones being laid out as follows:

First row:	Sardis or Ruby	Reuben
	Topaz	Simeon
	Carbuncle	Levi
Second Row:	Emerald	Judah
	Sapphire	Issachar
	Diamond	Zebulun
Third Row:	Ligure or Jacinth	Dan
	Agate	Naphtali
	Amethyst	Gad
Fourth Row:	Beryl, or Chrysolite	Asher
	Onyx, or Sardonyx	Joseph
	Jasper	Benjamin

Clarke, in commenting on the foundation referred to in Revelation, states:

"The gates represent the twelve tribes, verse 12; and these foundations or thresholds, the twelve apostles, verse 14.

"These stones are nearly the same with those on the breastplate of the high priest, Exod xxviii. 17,&c., and probably were intended to express the meaning of the Hebrew words there used." Clarke, supra., Vol III, p. 1060, 1061.

Clarke was quite correct. In checking out the meaning of the words they have a variety of meanings and can be made to duplicate the stones listed in Exodus 28. Therefore, they become symbolic of the "breastplate of judgement" worn by the high priest of Israel which contained a separate stone for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

God called this breastplate the "Breastplate of Judgement" and it was to be worn by Aaron in the Holy place of the temple. It was symbolic of Christ bearing the sins of the nation (Israel) on Himself at the time of His death on the cross. It is a symbol of God's coming righteousness. God, talking about His coming vengeance towards the end of the age, stated:

"And be put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head:..." Isa 59:17 (See also Eph 6:14 and I Thes 5:8)

In Revelation 9 there is a picture of Christ's Israelite army which describes them as wearing breastplates. These are breastplates of God's judgement. Revelation also records:

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." Rev 21:14

When the Israelites were in the wilderness the tabernacle was mobile, and as such, had no real solid foundation. They had the law but no redeemer. The foundation of the holy city in Revelation will be in the message of the apostles -- the message of the coming Kingdom of God and the redemption of Israel and salvation to all mankind.

The foundation of the holy city Jerusalem will be "adorned with all manner of precious stones" -- Israel. This again answers the statement in verse nine, "I will shew thee the bride,"

as the foundation symbolically depicts the foundation of the holy city built upon the apostles' gospel message of righteousness, salvation, and the coming kingdom of God which will be adorned with Israel -- the bride of Christ.

The Gates of the Holy City

John, in describing the holy city, Jerusalem, in the book of Revelation, stated:

"Having a wall great and high; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

"On the east were three gates; and on the north three gates; and on the south three gates; and on the west three gates." Rev 21:12-13

This verse states that the twelve gates to the holy city carry the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. Just as significant is the reference to the gates being to the north, east, south and west.

It will be helpful at this time to refer to the book of Numbers, chapter 2, where God laid out the divine arrangement for Israel's encampment. Quoting from Clarke's Commentaries:

"The Israelitish army was divided into three principle divisions. The first which was the least in extent, but the strongest and the most powerful, occupied the centre of the army: this was the throne of God, i.e., The TABERNACLE. The second, which was composed of the priests and Levites, surrounded the first. The third and the farthest from the centre took in all other tribes of Israel,....

"Four divisions, which faced the four quarters of the heavens, each with his own ensign, formed the centre of the army. JUDAH was placed on the east and under him he had Issachar and Zebulun; on the South was REUBEN, and under him Simeon and Gad; on the west was Ephraim, and under him Manasseh and Benjamin; finally DAN was on the north, and he had under him Asher and Naphtali." Clarke's Com-

mentary, VOL I, p. 616-617. (Compare this with Rev 21:12,13 & 16)

Clarke also states that the brigade symbol of Judah was the lion; Reuben's was a man; Ehpraim's was an ox (or calf); and Dan's was an eagle. This symbology will provide the Bible student an understanding of Ezekiel 1:10 and Revelation 4:7.

From the above description we can see that the nation of Israel was laid out in a square with three tribes on each side. It has also been noted that the holy city, Jerusalem, described in Revelation 21:16, is arranged in a square (the city lieth foursquare). Refer to appendix A.

Specifically addressing "gates," Clarke states:

"In Exod. xxxii. 27 we likewise find that mention is made of the gates of the camp:....From whence we may certainly conclude that if the camp had gates, the Israelites had also sentinels to guard them. If this be true, we may also believe that they were surrounded with entrenchments, or at least their gates were defended by some fortifications." Clarke's supra., Vol I, p. 618

The above commentary shows that the divine arrangement of the Israel encampment is basically the same as that of the gates, stated in Revelation 21:12-13,16, quoted at the beginning of this section on gates. Applying Clarke's description of the divine encampment in the wilderness to Revelation 21:3, it would read as follows:

On the east were three gates of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun; and on the north three gates of Dan, Asher and Naphtali; and on the south three gates of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad; and on the west three gates of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin.

Clarke further states of these gates:

"A gate for every tribe of Israel, in the vicinity of which gate that tribe dwelt; so that in coming and going out they did not mix with each other. This

description of the city is partly taken from Ezek. xlviii, 30-35." Clarke's Commentary, Vol III, p. 1059

It would probably be conceded by most biblical scholars that Ezekiel's vision recorded at Ezekiel 48 was a vision and description of the holy city, the new Jerusalem, which is again being described in Revelation.

It is difficult to come to any other conclusion than the gates of the holy city are arranged as was the divine arrangement of the Israel encampment in the wilderness. And just as was the divine encampment in the wilderness, so too will be the "holy city Jerusalem" which is symbolic of the bride of Christ, answering the statement in verse 9, "I will shew thee the bride" as "the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel" (verse 12) are written on the gates symbolically depicting Israel as the bride of Christ.

Twelve Pearly Gates

"And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the several gates was of one pearl...." Rev 21:21

Since the word "pearl" is not specifically defined in the Old Testament, it cannot be referred to for a description or definition. The word "pearl" does appear in the book of Job but would be better translated there as "crystal." There is, however, the parable about a pearl in the New Testament that will provide an answer.

One of the major problems in understanding the parables is that most modern churches have denied the continuity of Scripture. From their perspective the Old Testament is the old and the New Testament is the new and there is a separate and distinct division between the two. The churches have hopelessly separated the Bible by one page entitled "The New Testament." Then they attempt to understand the New without applying the history of the Old to the New. The only scriptural truths they know anything about are the church, salvation, grace, and faith. In denying the continuity of Scripture they have become like those who have eyes but cannot see, ears that cannot hear, and have hardened hearts toward truth.

A simple understanding that the Old Testament, from the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the history of God's kingdom nation called Israel, and that the New Testament is the continuing saga of that story will open blind eyes to the truth that every parable is about either the Kingdom of God or Israel.

The parable of the pearls is one of the shortest parables in Scripture and, for most people, very difficult to understand. It reads:

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls:

"And having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Matt 13:45-46

The first thing of significance about the pearl parable is the word "again," as this parable is an amplification of the previous parable, which is the parable of the hidden treasure. The parable of the pearls cannot be understood unless the parable of the hidden treasure is understood.

The Hidden Treasure

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure bidden in the field; which a man found, and bid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth the field." Matt 13:44

In order to understand this parable we must identify the meaning of the words, "treasure," "hidden," "man," and "field." In verse 38 of the previous parable we know that the field is the world or mankind. Therefore, somewhere in the world lies a hidden treasure.

This parable of the treasure and the pearl are explained in the author's book on the parables of Matthew 13 and will not be dealt with in detail at this time.

It will simply be stated that the "treasure" in the field is the kingdom of God (Israel). (See Ex 19:5, Psa 135:4, and Mal 3:17)

It is without question that Israel has been hidden or scattered in the world. There is such a volume of Scripture to support hidden Israel it seems useless to attempt to compile a complete list. See Deut 4:27, 28:64; II Sam 7:10; I Chron 17:9; Jer 30:24, 31:1,2,10, 50:6,17; Ez 34:11-16; Amos 9:9; Zec 1:19; Matt 10:6, 15:24; John 7:35, 10:16, 11:52; I Cor 10:1-4; Rom 9:3-5; James 1:1-2; I Pet 1:1. For a discussion on the subject see book by this author entitled "What Happened to Israel."

The man in the parable is the son of man, i.e., Christ (explained below). Using these definitions the parable would read:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure (Israel) which I have bidden (scattered) in the field (world); which a man (Christ) found, and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath (gave his life), and buyeth the field (redeeming Israel and saving the entire world).

Christ sought His people, and finding that which was lost, He gladly and with joy laid down His life to save them, fulfilling all of the prophecies concerning the redemption and restoration of Israel.

Christ came and found His treasure and hid it in the world and is molding them (the houses of Israel and Judah) a second time (Jer 18) making it ready for His return as king, when He shall "reign over the house of Jacob forever (until the end of the age)." Luke 1:33

Having determined that the hidden treasure is Israel, it becomes easier to understand the parable of the pearl. It is much easier to determine what the pearl is not than it is to identify what the pearl is. Christ is not the pearls as there is only one Christ and Christ is not a commodity to be bought and sold in any marketplace.

Salvation is not the pearl as salvation is the free gift of God and what is given by God cannot be bought or sold as in a marketplace. The church is not the pearl as the church is not

hidden from man. It may be a mystery to some but certainly it is not hidden. The man is not the general population of the world, Israel, or the church; the man is Christ and the pearl of great price is Israel.

In the previous parable, the treasure in the field was Israel and so it is in this parable as in this parable. The man (Christ) was seeking goodly pearls from among all the inhabitants of the world, and having found Israel, " He "went and sold (gave) all that He had (His life), and bought (redeemed) it," as in the previous parable. Christ is the redeemer of Israel (pearl) and Saviour of the entire world.

Christ has paid the price for Israel and the world. He came and died on the cross, paying the price to redeem the only nation on earth that was under the curse of the law, and thus the only people who could be bought back or redeemed, Israel (His treasure and pearl); and to purchase salvation for the entire world (all pearls).

Scripture abounds with factual evidence that Israel is the bride of Christ, God's peculiar treasure, hidden treasure, precious living stones, and the one pearl of great price.

(For a complete study on the issue of the parables concerning the kingdom of God refer to the author's book entitled "The Parables of Matthew 13.")

BODY OF CHRIST

The Church

Scripture contains no direct evidence that the church is the bride of Christ. Ephesians, chapter 5, is often referred to as proof that the church will be the bride of Christ, but under close examination, such a conclusion is not warranted. This is a story of the relationship between a husband and his wife, a married woman -- not a relationship between a bridegroom and his future bride.

In biblical days, bridegrooms and their future brides may never see each other before the wedding day. A case in point is Isaac and Rebecca. How can two people love each other as Christ loved the church when they have never even seen

each other? Even today, newlyweds do not love each other as Christ loved (agaped) the church; love in a marriage grows with time. Marriage does not start out as "one flesh" (Gen 2:24), but the goal is "to become one flesh" and for two people "to become one" takes time.

Christ, as the head of the body, loves the body, and man as the "head of the wife," should likewise, strive to love his wife as he loves his own body. Just because Christ loved the church does not mean that the church is the bride of Christ.

There is little controversy over the definition of the church or the body of Christ; however, for the purposes of this paper it will be considered a given biblical fact that "Christ is the head of the body, the church," and that "the church is the body of Christ." Col 1:18,24; Eph 1:22-23, 5:23.

Many people would conclude from the above that since the church is the body of Christ, the church is the bride of Christ. This is a vivid example of an illogical conclusion that is not supported by the statement given. Another example of illogic would be to conclude from the same statement that the church or the body of Christ is Christ. The church is the body of Christ -- the church is not Christ. Likewise, Christ is the head of the Church -- Christ is not the church.

From the statement, "Christ is the head of the body, the church," it can only be concluded that:

Christ is the head of the body.

Christ is the head of the Church.

The head of the church is Christ.

The head of the body is Christ.

Therefore:

The Church is the body (of Christ).

The body (of Christ) is the Church.

From the statement "Christ is the head of the body, the church," it should be noticed that there is a correlation between certain words. For example, the words "body" and "church" are words meaning the same thing, whereas the word Christ is not synonymous with the words body and church. It can

only be concluded that whatever the body/church is; Christ is its head, or the church is the body of Christ (see also Col 1:18).

Since the word "bride" is not contained in the body of either text, it cannot be concluded from the information given that the church is the bride of Christ.

Scripture states of believers:

"....Your bodies are members of Christ." I Cor 6:15

"Now you are Christ's body and members of it."
I Cor 12:27

"....we are members of his body." Eph 5:30

The entire body of Christ is the church (ek-klesia -- those called out). Christ is the firstborn from the dead, of every creature, and the "head of the body, the church" (Col 1:18), also referred to as the body of Christ. The body of Christ is composed of the entire congregation or assembly of believers who believe in and confess Christ Jesus as their personal Saviour. In other words all who truly believe are in the body of Christ.

Within the body of Christ are many believers having various levels of maturity and different gifts to perform as members of the body.

*"For even as we have many members in one body,
and all the members have not the same office:*

*"So we, who are many, are one body in Christ and
severally members one of another." Rom 12:4-5*

In Ephesians, Paul further states that gifts are:

*"For the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of
ministering, unto the building up of the body of
Christ:*

*"Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and
of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown
man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness
of Christ.*

"That we may be no longer children,....

"But speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into him, which is the head, even Christ;" Eph 4:12-15

As to various levels of maturity, some members of the body are:

"....children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error;..." Eph 4:14

In other words the body contains some believers who are babes in Christ, some being extremely mature (a fullgrown man), and some having various degrees of maturity between babes and maturity. Most Christians are babes on milk and need to "grow up in all things into him, which is the head, even Christ."

Babes

There are several analogies to support a growing into the fullness of Christ. Scripture speaks not only of fullgrown men but also those on milk and babes. Hebrews records:

"For everyone that partaketh of milk is without experience of the word of righteousness; for he is a babe." Heb 5:13

Any new-born Christian is like a child that has just been born. It cannot handle solid food and relies upon milk for its subsistence. As the child matures it can handle more solid food and it becomes weaned from milk and subsists largely upon solid food, eventually becoming a full-grown man. The Christian walk works in the same way. The new-born Christian is not ready for solid food and needs to be fed milk and slowly weaned until he can receive solid food, eventually maturing unto a fullgrown man.

In the preceding verse (Hebrews 5:12) reference is made to those "who by reason of time" ought to be teachers. Once a person is saved there should be a growth, and that growth will be made over time. If time has passed and a person has not matured, he will be as "a babe," and therefore "without

experience of the word of righteousness." He is such a babe that he needs to get back to basics as he has forgotten:

"...the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food." Heb 5:12

The new-born Christian has accepted Christ and received the gift of grace by faith, but that does not make him righteous. Obtaining righteousness comes with growth in the body of Christ and must be worked for and growth comes with the passage of time. Like Peter said it is necessary "to grow thereby unto salvation." 1 Pet 2:2

Fullgrown Men

There are those few in the body of Christ who, as stated above, have matured "unto a fullgrown man." These are the people who have matured in Christ to the point that they have grown "into him,... the head, even Christ." These true believers are the highest classification of believers within the body of Christ and will be found worthy to receive a reward higher than those who are not yet mature in the body.

Ferrar Fenton's version of Hebrews 5:13 and 14 reads as follows:

"For everyone who uses milk is ignorant of a reason for righteousness; for he is an infant.

"But solid food is for the matured, for those who through their disciplined faculties are exercised to decide between good and evil." Heb 5:13-14

Christians who simply live and breath Christ crucified and risen, or basically the message of salvation, are still on milk. They are "ignorant of a reason for righteousness" and being ignorant of righteousness, they cannot discern between good and evil.

Hopefully, passages such as these will encourage Christians to learn more than the basics and strive to know and understand the meatier things of Scripture. For example, there are seven mysteries or secrets of Scripture. (See Matt 13:11;

Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Rom 11:25, 16:25; Eph 3:3, 4:9, 32, 6:19; Col 1:26-27, Rev 1:20, I Cor 15:51; Eph 1:9; Col 2:2; Rev 10:7, II Thes 2:7; Rev 17:5,7)

As we shall see, the question becomes, who are the "fullgrown" men living on "solid food," or in the words of Matthew:

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the Lord has set over his household, to give them their food (meat) in due season." Matt 24:45

It has been shown that the body of Christ contains believers who are at various levels of maturity. Within the body of Christ, there are babes who do not grow in the proper manner and are still in need of "the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God" and those who partake of solid meat striving towards maturity of "a fullgrown man." It is this latter group that Christ is preparing to be "overcomers" or "friends of the bridegroom." They are the "joint heirs of Christ" and those who will:

"....inherit all things; and I will be their God, and be shall be my son." Rev 21:7

ISRAEL'S MODERN INIQUITY

The problem with modern Israel is that she has replaced the son of man, Christ, with other gods and has become a merchant in Babylon. Israel today worships man and the things of this world -- not Christ and His Word. Israel today includes the most prosperous nations in the world. They have been involved in trade, commerce, and business for centuries and are the wealthiest nations in the entire world. In fact they support the heathen world.

Israel is busy "seeking goodly pearls" in the world rather than recognizing that she (Israel) is "one pearl of great price" having been purchased by the greatest merchant of all -- Christ, who redeemed her from all her iniquities. Today Israel is busy storing up treasures in "unrighteous mammon" (Luke

16:9) and refuses to "go sell that thou hast,...and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me." Matt 19:21

Israel must wake up and quit playing the harlot and being "foolish" virgins (Matt 25:1-13) and:

"Come forth, my people (Israel - Jer 33:24), out of her (Babylon), that ye have no fellowship with her sins (friends of unrighteous mammon), and that ye receive not of her plagues." Rev 18:4

The majority of modern Israel is also functioning as the unjust steward, of which it is stated:

"....Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it shall fail, they may receive you into eternal tabernacles." Luke 16:9

This is sarcasm towards unjust enrichment. If you want to make friends through the use of deceitful riches, then when you are in need you are to turn to your friends (of mammon) which you have favored and see if they are willing to accept you into their abode. If you store up treasures in the material world, your reward is in the material things of this world. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt 6:24). Mammon is the pagan god of wealth and lawlessness. Mammon's servants of this present day are not only the heathen but also the lawless Israelites who dabble in the beast's (Babylonian) economic system.

"Lord, How long?" (Isa 6-11) will it take for thy servant Israel, thy lost sheep (Matt 10:6), to recognize herself as the "one pearl of great price" among all pearls, and "seek ye first the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 6:33), and make a total commitment to run the race (I Cor 9:24) to become a winner receiving the "prize of the high calling" (Phil 3:14), being among those who will become known as "friends of the bridegroom" (John 3:29)?

"Arise (Oh Israel), shine; for thy light (glory) is come, and the glory (light) of the LORD is risen upon thee." Isa 60:1

*Arise (Oh Israel), "The city of the LORD, The Zion
of the Holy One of Israel." Isa 60:14*

FRIENDS OF THE BRIDEGROOM

In the beginning of this book it was noted that John 3:29 establishes three major figures at a wedding ceremony: 1) the bride, 2) the bridegroom, and 3) the friends of the bridegroom. The bridegroom and the bride had already been addressed and now it is time to take a look at the friends of the Bridegroom. In ancient Israel customs, the friends of the bridegroom played an important part in wedding ceremonies and sometimes even conducted negotiations between parents of the bride and groom. In this regard, the friends of the bridegroom were well respected and very close to the bridegroom.

In many cases the groom never saw the bride before the marriage and in these cases the duties of friends was extremely important. Among their responsibilities was the requirement to examine the prospective bride and determine whether she was physically and mentally fit. It may also have been the friends responsibility to examine and exhibit the tokens of the bride's purity according to the law of Deut 22:13-22.

Once it was determined that the prospective bride was chaste and otherwise suitable for marriage the friends rejoiced in triumph over having found someone who was marriageable as their character and the happiness of their friend was at stake.

Once selected, the friends would act as a messenger between the Groom and a the family of the bride conveying messages one to the other.

The friends were responsible for the seven day wedding feast insuring that all went well and if necessary, having investigated the bride before marriage, they defended the chastity and character of the bride. Sometimes the friends even stayed in a room near the newlyweds to protect them from injury.

Thus we see the importance of the friends of the Bridegroom but this does not reveal their identity. Before continuing this discussion, let us remember that in referring to the bride, Bullinger said:

"This fixes the meaning of the term (bride) as applying only to Israel, and not to the church, which is the body of Christ, part of 'Christ mystical'; in other words, part of the bridegroom." Bullinger, supra, p. 61.

Bullinger's "Christ mystical"; in other words, part of the bridegroom," is described in Rom 11:25, 16:25-26; Eph 3:1-11,32, 6:19; Col 1:26-27; and Rev 1:20. Bullinger's implication is that the church, or at least some of the church, is part of the bridegroom -- not the bride. This is the mystery of those who are taken from the church or the Body of Christ, having become "a fullgrown man" (Eph 4:13), and are worthy to be a "friend of the bridegroom." The problem with the friends of the Bridegroom is explained very simply by John, who stated:

"He that bath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and beareth him, rejoice greatly because of the bridegroom's voice:..." John 3:29

It is plain that Christ, as the bridegroom, holds or possesses the bride, who is Israel, but the bride cannot at the same time be the bride and the friends of the Bridegroom. In this regard, the verse shows a clear distinction between the "bride" and the "friends of the bridegroom." It would appear that the bridegroom has or possesses the bride, while it is the friends of the bridegroom who are standing nearby and are rejoicing over the fact that the bridegroom has the bride.

Thus the "friends of the bridegroom" cannot be the bride. The "friends of the bridegroom" will not marry the bridegroom nor share in possessing the bride. The friends of the bridegroom are part of the wedding party and will be in attendance at the wedding festivities before the marriage takes place. It is the friends of the bridegroom who, having heard

the voice of the bridegroom, stand with or beside the bridegroom as His witnesses during the wedding ceremony and rejoice, having stood on the promises of God's voice (Word).

John 3:29 is not the only reference to the bridegroom having friends. For example, the Pharisees came to Christ and asked why His disciples were not fasting. He replied:

"...Can the sons of the bride-chamber mourn, so long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast." Matthew 9:15

The Concordant Literal New Testament states almost the same thing:

"...The sons of the bride chamber cannot be mourning, in as much as the bridegroom is with them. Yet coming will be the days whenever the bridegroom may be taken away from them, and then they will be fasting."

The gospel of Mark records the statement of Christ as:

"...the attendants of the bridegroom do not fast,..." Mark 2:19

The gospel of Luke states:

"Can ye make the sons of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?" Luke 5:34

The Amplified Bible states:

"Can the wedding guests mourn....."

The Ferrar Fenton version states:

"The groomsmen must not be distressed while the...."

The many uses of the terms "sons of the bride-chamber," "attendants," "wedding guests," "groomsmen," and "friends of the bridegroom," clearly demonstrate that there are three

groups of people involved with the coming wedding -- the bride, the bridegroom, and the friends of the bridegroom.

Christ does not refer to the disciples as the bride of the bridegroom but calls them "sons of the bride chamber" or the friends of the bridegroom. The sons or the friends will be in attendance at the wedding festivities, and will assist the bridegroom in preparing the bride for the wedding, and stand beside the bridegroom on that day. Who, then, are these friends of the bridegroom? Christ stated:

"Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you.

"No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my father I have made known unto you." John 15:14-15

The gospel of Luke also records Christ referring to His disciples as friends:

"And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." Luke 12:4

The disciples "know(eth) what his lord doeth" because Christ made known unto them those things which He heard from the Father, and therefore, they qualify as friends of Christ or "friends of the bridegroom." They are those who have run the race and qualify for the "prize of the high calling" -- the disciples are among those who "overcome(th)." They are the faithful and wise "friends of the bridegroom" who rejoice because of His voice.

The Voice of God

There are numerous usages of the word "voice" in the Old Testament and it is quite evident that "voice" also means "word." Therefore, the bridegroom's voice is the Word of Christ. (See Gen 3:8, 26:5, 27:8,13; Ex 3:18, 4:1,8,9, 5:2, 15:26, etc.)

Ten Virgins

The disciples will not be the only "friends of the bridegroom" as the "friends of the bridegroom" will include all who "overcome(th)." It has often been said that the 10 virgins are the bride of Christ and the church.

Addressing this subject, Bullinger stated:

"It is impossible to take the church as represented by both the Ten Virgins and the Bride! If the Church is the Bride, then it (the church) cannot be the Virgins. If the Church is represented by the Ten Virgins, then it (the church) cannot be the Bride." Bullinger, supra.

Bullinger's statement makes little sense when applying it to this parable, as nowhere in the parable does the word "bride" appear. However, it has already been shown that Israel is the bride of Christ; therefore the bride cannot be the 10 virgins. It would appear that the only conclusion left is that the 10 virgins are the "church," the "body of Christ."

Verse 10 of the parable states: "And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast." Most people believe the "they" in this verse to be the church, which they consider the bride of Christ, leading them to the conclusion that the bride is at the wedding. However, if the church is the bride and it is the bride who "went in with him" then half of the bride will not attend her own wedding as only five go inside while the other five are out obtaining more oil.

It should be pointed out that this is not a wedding but a wedding feast (festivities) or a bachelor party, and only the "friends of the bridegroom" are in attendance. Therefore, the bride is not in attendance.

As previously established, the believers within the body of Christ are made up of various levels of maturity from babes in Christ, to those who have matured "unto a fullgrown man,...into him, which is the head, even Christ." Eph 4:13,15

The five wise virgins who enter the door are not the bride but the friends of Christ (John 15:14-15, 3:29) who have been chosen from the entire body of Christ to assist the bridegroom

in preparing the bride (Israel) for the wedding ceremony. It is the bridegroom and His friends who attend the marriage feast or festivities -- not the bride.

The New Concordant Bible interprets "marriage feast" as "wedding festivities." A knowledge of Israelite customs provide us with the fact that wedding festivities begin long before the wedding took place. In selecting friends and guests to attend the "wedding festivities" the bridegroom would certainly not invite the unfaithful and foolish virgins of the body of Christ.

The bridegroom would select from the body of Christ His true believers, those who were faithful and wise, those who have become "a fullgrown man," those who have run the race and will now be rewarded with the "*prize of the high calling*." It is these select few true believers and followers of Christ who have been obedient unto His Word who are called the "friends of the bridegroom" and who will attend the "wedding festivities."

They are those who "overcome(th)," and "stand(eth)" with Him on the wedding day and "hear(eth) him", and "rejoice" because of the bridegroom's voice (Word) which they have been faithful to keep until He came. It is so stated by John when he said:

"He that hath the bride (Israel) is the bride-groom (Christ): but the friend of the bridegroom (those who overcometh), which standeth and heareth him, rejoice greatly because of the bridegroom's voice (word):..." John 3:29

CONCLUSION

This is not an attempt to exclude non-Israelites from being a part of God's plan for the ages (after all, none of us can change God's plan), as this is a very limited study and we are only addressing the friends of the bridegroom and the bride as recorded by the prophets, who only addressed Israel.

The Old Testament is the recorded history of Adam's genealogy to the days of Abraham and then of Isaac and Jacob (Israel), and their descendants -- the nation of Israel.

Basically, other peoples or nations are addressed only when they have some contact with Adam's genealogy and/or the nation of Israel.

Being able to explain and understand the friends of the Bridegroom helps understand the mystery of the Church or the body of Christ. The church is not the bride of Christ -- the bride of Christ is Israel.

The Church is the body of Christ and Christ will select from the body His "friends of the bridegroom" who will stand with Him and rejoice on His great and wondrous wedding day.

The "friends of the bridegroom" will be the loyal and faithful who "seek ye first the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 6:33), and make a total commitment to run the race (I Cor 9:24) to become a winner receiving the "prize of the high calling" (Phil 3:14), being among those who will become known as "friends of the bridegroom" (John 3:29).

The "friends of the bridegroom" are those who "overcome(th)" and:

*"He that overcometh shall inherit these things;
and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."*

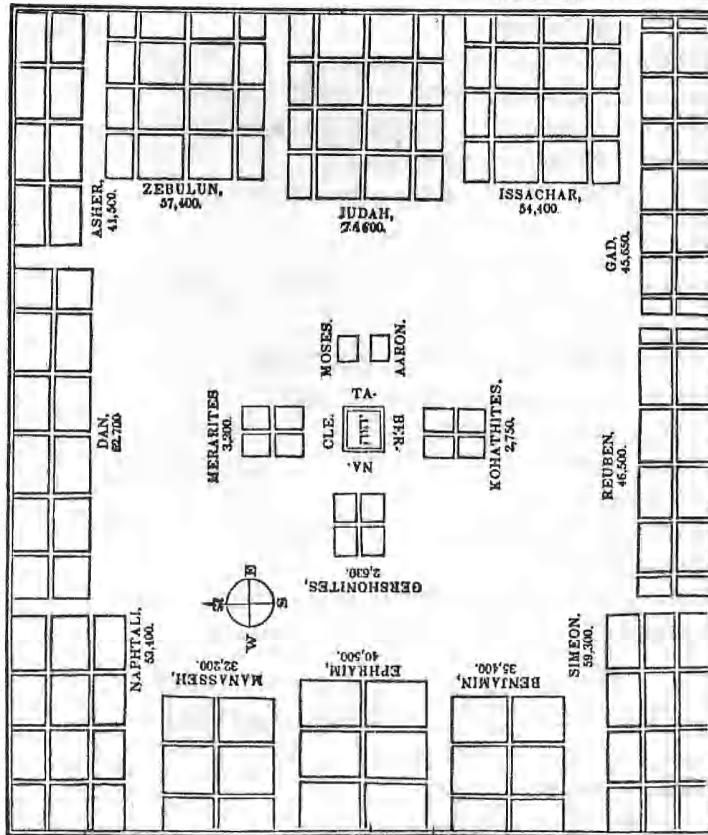
--- Revelation 21:7

AMEN!

APPENDIX A

Camp of the Israelites in the Wilderness

DIAGRAM OF THE ISRAELITISH CAMP



Taken from Clarke's Commentary, Vol I, page 622

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